

**TESTIMONY OF BETSY MORGAN, THE DIRECTOR OF THE MIDDLESEX
COALITION FOR CHILDREN, MIDDLETOWN
BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF RAISED S.B. NO. 738 AN ACT CONCERNING TRUANCY**

MARCH 1, 2010

I am testifying for the Middlesex Coalition for Children, an advocacy organization whose mission is "to improve the lives of children in Middletown and Middlesex County." The Coalition has been working for the last five years to improve and coordinate services for what we call "kids in trouble" -- children and youth who are DCF-involved, juvenile justice-involved, have behavioral health issues, and experiencing serious school failure. In all four areas truancy is a common thread -- both a symptom and a cause. I am also testifying as a member of Middletown's Youth Services Advisory Council and as a former 12-year member of the Middletown Board of Education.

There are two main reasons we are supporting Raised Bill No. 278:

1. **There is currently no strong coordinated effort to reduce truancy across the state.** This is a **major**, not a minor, issue, and SDE needs to take a more central and proactive role in addressing it. SDE should be the central organizing body for truancy programs. Only if SDE takes on this role will the Governor and General Assembly get the truancy data and program information needed to hold school districts accountable. Some districts are doing a good job. Many need both help and prodding to improve.
2. **It is currently impossible to get an accurate, complete picture of the truancy problem in Connecticut.** A uniform definition of "unexcused" and "excused" absences is needed so that we can compare and contrast our district's rates with those of other districts statewide. Moreover, the lack of uniformity across districts confuses parents.

Raised Bill No. 278 will not solve the serious truancy problem in Connecticut schools. Far from it. But it takes some important preliminary steps in that direction. It is a vital beginning.

Respectfully submitted

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